



August 12, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Danny K. Davis
Chairman, Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jackie Walorski
Ranking Member, Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Republican Leader McCarthy, Chairman Davis and Ranking Member Walorski:

We, the undersigned organizations, are leading child welfare advocates in our states and are affiliated with the State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center (SPARC) -- a network of state and local organizations from around the country that advocates for the safety, health and well-being of more than 3.5 million children who have experienced, or are at risk of, child abuse or neglect.

Through our work with families, public and private agencies, researchers and community and faith-based organizations, we have a clear understanding of the pandemic's dramatic impact on families involved in child welfare. To this end, we write to express our support for the provisions in the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act (H.R. 7947), including:

- Increased funding and support for older youth who experienced foster care, including \$350 million for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, \$50 million for the Educational & Training Vouchers Program, and an increase in the maximum ETV award amount to \$12,000 per youth. The bill temporarily waives the state match requirement for these additional Chafee funds, raises the maximum age for Chafee-eligible former foster youth through age 26, and provides temporary program flexibilities, including lifting the 30 percent spending cap on housing costs and accommodating pandemic-related disruptions in work and education;
- Prevents youth from aging out of foster care during the pandemic by prohibiting states from requiring a child to leave foster care solely due to their age. The bill requires states to allow youth who have already "aged out" of foster care during the pandemic to voluntarily re-enter care. The legislation also allows states to use additional Chafee funds to offset costs associated with these requirements for youth not eligible for federal matching funds;
- Provides resources to help states and communities makes critical prevention and early intervention services available to help more children stay safely at home by expanding access to Family First Prevention Services by waiving state matching requirements during the pandemic for evidence-based mental health, substance abuse, and parenting

skill services to allow states to invest in prevention services that keep children safely at home;

- Provides \$75 million in emergency funding for the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and waives state match for these additional funds to support family preservation, family reunification, adoption, and other supportive services;
- Expands funding for the Court Improvement Program by \$10 million to assist courts in handling child welfare cases and provides temporary flexibilities to conduct virtual hearings, and waives the state match for the new funds;
- Provides flexibilities for home visiting programs to continue to serve families safely by temporarily allowing necessary program flexibilities in the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Education Home Visiting program, including virtual home visits, sustained funding for staffing and allows states to use federal funds which would otherwise revert back to U.S. Department of the Treasury;
- Expands access to kinship navigator programs during the public health emergency, waives the state match and allows states to use models not yet in the Evidence Clearinghouse for kinship navigator programs, to provide greater access to federal funding to support grandparents and kin caregivers;
- Makes technical corrections to Title IV-E treatment of the 6.2 percent Federal Medical Assistance Percentage increase for Family First Transition Act funding.

These provisions would provide urgently needed federal resources to help children, youth and families – and the agencies that serve them – navigate the myriad difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We commend your bipartisan leadership and action on behalf of children and families who have been hit hard by the pandemic. It's our hope that Congress will act swiftly to enact this important legislation so that these targeted federal resources can begin mitigating the challenges facing children and youth in foster care today, as well as those who are at-risk of entering foster care.

In addition, we urge Congress to take action to further strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment. Research tells us that children are specifically vulnerable during the pandemic due to increasing risk factors associated with maltreatment: social isolation; parental stress, economic instability, parental substance use; untreated acute or physical and behavioral health challenges; reduced access to community supports and observation including child care and schools; and increased exposure to domestic violence against adults. It's critically important that Congress provide federal assistance to ensure that children and families stay safe and healthy and connected to community services.

Again, we commend your outstanding leadership and we are pleased to lend our support to the bipartisan *Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act*. We join others in calling on Congress to support swift passage of this legislation, which offers targeted assistance to preserve the safety and well-being of children, youth and families across the country.

Sincerely,

Voices for Georgia's Children

Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Common Good Iowa
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Children Now (California)
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
Florida's Children First
Michigan's Children
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (New York)
Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)
Nebraska Appleseed
Voices for Vermont's Children
Juvenile Law Center
Hawai'i Children's Action Network
FosterAdopt Connect (Missouri and Kansas)
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Children's Home Society of North Carolina
Voices for Virginia's Children
Our Children Oregon
Partners for Our Children
Ohio Children's Alliance
SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out/North Carolina)